

## Public Attitudes in Michigan Regarding Sentencing Juveniles to Life without Parole

During the spring and summer of 2005 independent, state-wide polling was conducted by Wayne State University Center for Urban Studies.<sup>1</sup>

The statewide poll found that only 5% of Michigan residents supported juveniles serving life without parole in adult facilities.<sup>2</sup>

The polling was also useful for discovering the beliefs of Michigan residents with regard to the treatment of juveniles who commit serious crimes. Only 26% of Michigan residents believe that adolescents between the age of 12 and 17 years old are as responsible as adults. More specifically, the majority of respondents did not believe that juveniles who commit violent offenses should receive the same punishment as an adult. Rather, they stated their strong belief that adolescents should be given a chance at parole even in homicide offenses.

Michigan citizens also felt strongly that adolescents 16 and younger do not belong in adult correctional facilities. Nearly 80% of respondents believed that adolescents 14, 15, & 16 should not be imprisoned in adult prisons, and over 72% believed adolescents under the age of 18 who commit violent offenses are strong candidates for rehabilitation, supporting second chances.

This polling is consistent with the results of several focus groups conducted in Grand Rapids and Southfield this year. The initial assessment demonstrated "a fairly high level of prevailing support for reform" of the current sentencing scheme for juveniles. When the four groups were provided basic facts on the waiver laws and the number of juveniles serving life without parole in Michigan, the support for change of the juvenile life without parole laws became overwhelming.

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<sup>1</sup> Researchers at the Wayne State School of Social Work (Kubiak, Allen & King) teamed up with survey experts at the Center for Urban Studies (CUS) to ask Michigan constituents questions on sentencing juveniles for serious crimes. Each year the Center for Urban Studies conducts a general population statewide survey of Michigan residents 18 and older using random digit dialing technique. The survey consisted of 750 completed interviews.

<sup>2</sup> Respondents included individuals from every county in Michigan in proportion to their size in the overall state population. Respondents were more likely to be female (36% male, 64% female), with a per capita income of \$38,113 and 79% were White/Caucasian, 16% African American, and 2% Hispanic. The mean age of respondents was 50 years old; 34% of the sample had a bachelors degree or higher.